

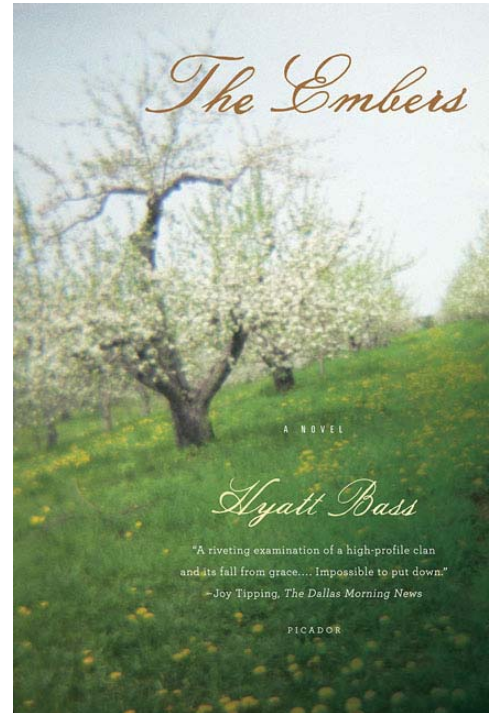
READING GROUP GUIDE

The Embers A Novel

by Hyatt Bass

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Embers* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Embers*.

About the Book

Blessed with beauty, talent, and a loving family, the Aschers seem to have it all. Joe and Laura are the toast of New York--a wildly successful playwright and a wealthy, well-educated actress. Then one winter night, seventeen-year-old Thomas dies, and the Aschers lose everything. More than a decade later, as their daughter Emily's wedding approaches, the family yearns to reconnect. But in order to do so, Joe, Laura, and Emily will first have to confront the tangle of blame, guilt, and long-held secrets that tore them apart. Shifting between past and present over the course of sixteen years, *The Embers* is an utterly gripping and exquisitely tender story of a family struggling to reconcile the past and embrace the future.

About the Author

Hyatt Bass wrote, directed, and produced the film *75 Degrees in July*, which was released in 2006. *The Embers* is her first novel.

Discussion Questions

1. What were your first impressions of Emily and her family? How did your opinions of them shift as you learned about their shared history? What are the most striking differences in the way they each experienced Thomas's death?
2. Did anyone do anything "wrong" during the therapy session with Dr. Shepherd, or was the impasse between Emily and Joe simply already too great? What did Joe really mean when he blurted out, "I didn't do anything"?
3. Joe and Laura's marriage was on rocky ground even before Joe's affair and the events surrounding Thomas's death. Why were they growing apart? Did their difficulties seem insurmountable?
4. Emily and Thomas have a complicated—though loving—relationship. How did the dynamic between them compare to your own experience of siblings? Could you understand Emily's need to act out during Thomas's illness? Could her parents have done more for her during that period?
5. How does Earl handle his role as a stepfather and second husband? Does Laura respond to him differently from the way she responded to Joe? Do the two men have any traits in common?
6. What does Ramon's case represent to Emily? What makes her well suited to her job as his attorney?
7. Clay and Emily experience a turning point in their relationship on their holiday ski trip. What was at the source of their fights? Were you rooting for them to work things out? How do their personalities complement each other?
8. What memories does Ingrid stir in Joe? In turn, what does she need from him? Did learning the truth about who Ingrid really was surprise you?
9. What were Joe's motivations in taking Thomas on a trip to the country? How were Laura and Emily affected not just by Thomas's death but by the way he died? Do the circumstances that led to Thomas's pneumonia warrant blame?
10. What does *The Embers* reveal about trust and authentic love? What enables the Ascher family to grieve and to feel hope again? Has your family experienced a similar loss that was never fully addressed?

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